



- **Link service-learning to state and local standards, assessments, and accountability tools.**

**E**VERY CALIFORNIA SCHOOL DISTRICT IS MOVING toward a standards-based accountability system that consists of setting standards, assessing student achievement, analyzing and reporting student achievement, and implementing instructional improvement. Service-learning allows students both to learn curriculum content and to use their knowledge. Service-learning can be a primary assessment tool by which students demonstrate what they know while fulfilling a real community need. When incorporated into accountability processes, service-learning can be evaluated for its impact on students, schools, teachers, and the community.

### **Infuse Service-Learning into Standards**

School districts are establishing content and performance standards, at least as rigorous as the state's standards, to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education necessary to succeed in the twenty-first century. Content standards establish what children should know and be able to do within a subject area, while performance standards measure how well students can apply the knowledge and skills they have learned.

Service-learning enables students to demonstrate their mastery of content standards and to under-

# Using Service-Learning to Teach Content Standards

San Francisco Unified School District

In the San Francisco Unified School District, the standards define content and leave teaching methodology to the individual teachers. For example, in mathematics:

**Standard 2, Geometry and Measurement:** *Students demonstrate their knowledge of basic skills, conceptual understanding, and problem solving in geometry and measurement.*

Students in grade three who meet the standard will:

- Describe, model, draw, and classify shapes.
- Measure the length of objects by repeating a unit.
- Estimate the length using nonstandard units.
- Measure the length of common objects using standard units in both customary and metric units.

**Standard 4, Statistics and Probability:** *Students demonstrate their knowledge of basic skills, conceptual understanding, and problem solving in statistics and probability.*

Students in grade three who meet the standard will:

- Collect, organize, and display data in diagrams, graphs, and charts.
- Compare data in order to make true statements.
- Make simple inferences about data.

After investigating and developing a model city accessible to disabled individuals, third graders at San Francisco Community School decided to build a wheelchair ramp for their school. Students learned about city ordinances from San Francisco city employees and then spent a day with the people responsible for public transportation systems and public works and with other local experts. The students later consulted with these experts as needed.

To accomplish their project, the students learned important mathematics skills from standards 2 and 4. First, students focused on understanding basic geometric shapes and angles. Students developed skills measuring objects to design their ramp. They assisted in the design of a functioning wheelchair ramp and were asked to develop diagrams and charts for the project to present to local experts and school representatives. This process required that students not only learn the contents of Standard 4, but also have the knowledge to apply it.

Local architects, school administrators, grounds staff, parents, and representatives for the Access Appeal Commission worked with the students to complete the project and build the wheelchair ramp at the school.

Yvonne Scott, Teacher, San Francisco Community School

The content standards for mathematics are from the San Francisco Unified School District's "Mathematics Draft Interim Content and Performance Standards, Version 1.2," September 1996.

stand the relevance of what they are learning (Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik 1982, 243). Since citizenship development is also addressed in school, service-learning must be used to prepare California's youth to be active citizens and deepen their understanding of their responsibilities in a democracy. All content areas can be forums for service-learning activities in which students develop civic responsibility while they learn the curriculum.

The California Curriculum Development and Supplemental Materials Commission, which is responsible for recommending curriculum frameworks and instructional materials to the State Board of Education, must incorporate into all new and revised curriculum framework documents examples of how service-learning can be used to teach the core curriculum. Additionally, textbook selection criteria must encourage the inclusion of service-learning as an important strategy. The addition of service-learning to the criteria would allow educators to see the connections between the curriculum and service opportunities.

As districts develop local performance standards, service-learning must be included because students can show how well they understand curriculum content and how they use the knowledge and skills outside the classroom. Fine arts teachers know that student performances in concerts or school plays presented before an audience are better than those given during a rehearsal. Vocational teachers know that when their students must demonstrate their skills in competition or in a work-based setting, the performance is better than in class. Similarly, when young people can demonstrate their knowledge and skills through service-learning, teachers report that the quality of the work improves.

### **Use Service-Learning Activities as Assessment Opportunities**

Each California school district will be establishing multiple ways of measuring how well its youth

know the curriculum content and can apply that content to everyday situations. Service-learning is a natural method for students to display their ability to use their knowledge. Additionally, students' growth in citizenship and civic responsibility and their knowledge of our democratic society can be assessed as students participate in service-learning activities.

Many student work products generated through service-learning occur outside the classroom, creating new assessment opportunities. As students provide services to the community, they often demonstrate their knowledge of content in actual community interactions, such as speeches and exhibits. Students may also develop workshops for their peers or for adults, arrange informal discussions with their families, and design brochures. These activities provide opportunities for assessing students' academic knowledge and technical-career skills, just as performances in a school play are judged by peers, parents, and the community. Community members interact with the students and see firsthand the students' understanding of curriculum content knowledge and skills.

### **Link Service-Learning to Accountability Systems**

A successful local accountability system is based on developing interdependent partnerships among educators, parents, and community members. Accountability monitoring procedures that contain service-learning components or into which service-learning can be infused already exist in the educational system.

These procedures include the following:

- **Focus on Learning: WASC-CDE Joint Process.** *Focus on Learning (FOL)* for California public high schools was developed as a school improvement process. *FOL* combines the high school accreditation by the Western Association

## Service-Learning Linked to Accountability

Excerpts from the Rubrics for Focus on Learning:  
Schoolwide Criteria for Powerful Teaching and Learning

Learning is linked to clearly defined standards, and students know beforehand the standards they must attain for each unit of study. Students make choices about their work based on their interests, skills, learning styles, and knowledge of expected performance.

Learning experiences regularly involve students in formulating and solving problems, **working in teams, communicating about their work, reflecting on and revising work** in progress, and refining interpersonal skills. Students have frequent opportunities to create new knowledge by reflecting on what they already know. They **solve problems and create products that have personal and public value beyond the classroom**, and student work is routinely celebrated and critiqued by a variety of audiences.

Students demonstrate the ability to **apply their knowledge across disciplines; in courses, programs, and activities that integrate academic and career-technical content**; and in real-world situations through multidisciplinary portfolios, public forums, etc., that are reviewed by peers and community panels.

Students spend significant parts of each day in collaborative work. Both in and out of the classroom, **teachers and students work together as co-learners**. Students frequently show interest, enthusiasm, curiosity, engagement, perseverance, a willingness to work hard, and a commitment to achieving the expected schoolwide learning results.

**There is active involvement of community members in the teaching and learning process.** Student work is demonstrated across the disciplines through community-based activities and assessed by teams including community members.

*Focus on Learning: WASC–CDE Joint Process*

*Note: The text set in bold shows the connection between Focus on Learning and service-learning.*

of Schools and Colleges (WASC) with the legal requirements for a Program Quality Review.

The *FOL* school self-study is organized around an examination of student work related to content and performance standards and the expected schoolwide learning results included in the school's mission. Schools that embrace service-learning provide more powerful learning opportunities and can also provide assessment of student achievement related to specific content standards and the interdisciplinary schoolwide learning goals. In addition, service-learning provides opportunities for community feedback to the students and the school. This information is a necessary part of accountability monitoring.

- **Program Quality Review.** In elementary schools and middle schools, the school self-study cycle is supported by guidelines of the Program Quality Review (PQR), which is a powerful lever for improving student learning. PQR provides schools with a process for public accountability and in-depth, comprehensive planning. What makes PQR so powerful is its focus on student learning relative to content and performance standards. By examining what students are actually learning, schools can analyze their instructional programs and learning environments and make needed adjustments.

Local accountability processes can monitor the use of service-learning as an instructional strategy. The critical questions that should be answered about service-learning are, What is its impact on students' academic achievement, on students' sense of civic responsibility, on the school and its culture, and on the community?

Training in service-learning is necessary to ensure that any accountability system is effective. The persons who are participating in a self-review process or who are from an accreditation agency must be knowledgeable about service-learning and should look for these elements:

- The service is meeting a real community need.
- The service activity is coordinated with an elementary school, a middle school, a high school, a higher education institution, or the community.
- The service fosters civic responsibility.
- The service enhances the academic curriculum.
- Structured time is provided for participants to reflect on the service experience.

### **Further Reading Related to This Recommendation**

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